

Regents Innovation Fund
Grant Proposals for Learner-Centered Education

Title of Proposal:

**Improving Student Centered Learning:
Second Generation Mentoring and Language Support Labs**

Proposed by:

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University of Arizona

Business Communication Program

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Improving Student Centered Learning:

Proposal Title: Second Generation Mentoring and Language Support Labs

Primary Institution: University of Arizona DEPT/Unit: Business Communication Program

Multi-Campus/University Projects
(check other campuses or universities participating)

List other participating agencies:

ASU Main UA
 ASU East UA South
 ASU West NAU

Briefly describe the program and the development plan.

To support the Business Communication Program’s mid-career writing assessment curriculum by developing learner-centered course models, improving assessment and remediation, and determining assessment of learning outcomes at the course and program level.

Funding Category

Indicate a primary (P) and, if applicable, secondary (S) funding category:

Professional Development _____ Program or Course Development/Modification P
LCE Research _____ Improved Assessment of Learning Outcomes S

Authorizations

Project Director

Signature: _____

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Department Chair / Unit Director/ College Dean/Provost writing letter of support

Name: Stephen Gilliland Title Vice Dean

Official Authorized to Enter into Contractual Obligations

Signature _____

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I. Abstract:

The overall goal of our proposed project is to build upon the initiatives funded in last year's proposal to improve assessment of learning outcomes at the course and program level within the Business Communication Program at Eller College of Business and Public Administration. Last year's implementations resulted in the successful development of a college wide writing assessment and multiple module course models. The sustainability of this project rests on the final development of support labs that would provide the program with the necessary support to continue developing student-centered curriculum and improved evaluation and assessment of student learning.

Specifically, the project will continue to assess students' communication skills before entering the professional program. This information will be used in two ways: 1) to identify individual student needs in these areas, and 2) to continue to develop LCE based support labs to foster student success. The data gathered over the past year confirms the need for additional development of language labs for our ESL population. Further, program offerings could be augmented by the addition of a support lab that provides our mid-range students with mentors to assist in written and oral communication. Targeting specific skill areas for support prior to final assessments has proven to be dramatically effective in improving student performance. To this end, the accelerated sections of our course have created a second-generation of highly trained student mentors who could continue to develop their own communication skills while functioning as mentors to entering students. At the end of each semester, students will also be assessed to ascertain whether the current model is serving their needs. In addition, they will also be asked to complete a questionnaire inviting their input about how well the courses met their needs and how these might be improved. All of this information will be utilized to adapt courses as needed to better meet students' needs and learning styles.

II. Identification of Need:

Project Description and Justification

Currently, the Eller College of Business services 1600 advanced standing students in its undergraduate program. Of these students, Eller admits approximately 400-450 new students every semester. Our enrollment numbers of international students has been growing over the past five years. Although these students may have demonstrated basic proficiency on the TOEFL test, many have a marked need for further assessment and remediation with basic communication skills. Our students have been consistently targeted as a student population greatly in need of a context specific, academically rigorous communication class that addresses their deficiencies in oral and written communication. This need becomes more urgent when we consider for the past four years the National Association of Colleges and Employers have documented employer respondents consistently prioritizing communication skills as the number one sought after job qualification.

To demonstrate a commitment toward addressing these needs, Eller College has established the Business Communication Program. This program now serves not only the undergraduate population but the MBA program as well, addressing the need for increased communication skills among the student population. Most notably, the development of a required core communications class has been implemented for all advanced standing undergraduate students. Students must complete this academically rigorous course and demonstrate proficiency in written and oral communication, with an additional emphasis on group communication, research, and the cultivation of practical business communication skills.

Due to the funding we received for the 2002-2003 we were able to implement and put into practice a rigorous assessment project designed to assess incoming students to determine placements according to core competencies; in addition, we have developed an in-house, college wide assessment tool to take a final skill measure of writing and critical thinking skills as the students exit the course. The success of this

individual assessment has been verified as this tool has currently been adopted by the college as an essential skill base measure that is now a degree check qualification: students must now demonstrate writing proficiency in order to proceed in their major course studies. Our results have been compelling, and have dictated necessary program modifications to continue accommodating students' needs.

Eller College of Business students are required to attend their classes in a cohort system. Although most initial classes are delivered in lecture format, the communications class is an exception. In an ongoing attempt to improve and address undergraduate skill base, Eller College of Business has generated funding to deliver the communications class in a classroom setting. The course delivers the materials to the students through a number of different approaches that engage critical thinking and utilize active learning modules.

As our funding needs have dictated in the past, the size and diversity of our student population demonstrates a critical need to tailor student-learning experiences to maximize success. With the funding we received, we developed the tools to diagnose student skill base in order to determine student placement in class modules designed to meet student needs. This has resulted in permanent curriculum development that now more effectively meets the needs of a wide range of ability and learning styles. Furthermore, our results indicate our students needs will be best served by continuing to develop and add support labs that provide the necessary mentoring to effectively accommodate individual learning styles.

To meet these ends, it is critical we continue administering a diagnostic to determine basic student skills. Our 2003-2004 results indicate we gathered the most accurate results from written assessment. We propose to continue to administer assessments upon admission into the professional program and at the end of the first semester communication class. Once student skills have been assessed, placement in corresponding communications class will maximize student learning.

Consistent with Proposition 301, the key concepts utilized in the Business Communications class embrace the focus on individual learning, prompt feedback, and students taking responsibility for meeting the rigors and demands of the course. With the necessary diagnostic tools and basic assessments in place, our faculty will continue the further development of communication classes that address multiple learning styles, provide learning based on student proficiencies, and that reproduce and encourage individual research and partnerships with local corporations.

Supporting the Learner-Centered Education Initiative

Demonstrated Success:

Via the funds received for implementing and developing assessment tools from last year's grant, the Business Communication Program has greatly enhanced and improved the ability to diagnose and place students into appropriate course modules. The result of previous funds has resulted in the following program modifications and improvements: 1) the implementation of a college wide writing assessment that measures student writing and critical thinking ability, now recognized as a degree check requirement for the Eller College of Business; 2) the implementation of BAD 315, a remediation course devoted exclusively to the development and support of students recognized as requiring additional one-one-one instruction to bring their communication skills up to a passing level; 3) the development and implementation of a baseline writing diagnostic currently administered to all incoming cohort students to determine course placement; 4) the development of course modules designed to meet student needs, in particular placing students in advanced, mid-range, or at-risk course modules. We are extremely pleased with the results ABOR's funding has been able to deliver. We now recognize additional needs in program modification and improvement to fully build upon the LCE initiatives with our program's offerings.

Phase Two: Proposed Improvements:

The data we have gathered over the past year revealed students benefit the most from early intervention. To this end, we propose the development and implementation of Phase Two of our program modification by the development and addition of two support labs to enhance student-centered learning. After students have had their initial skill base determined, we propose the development and implementation of two additional learner-centered support labs.

Our current assessment results indicate a little over 10% of the accepted student population has a substantial need for a support lab that provides additional English language support. We have found the best practice for our ESL students is to keep them placed in our mid-range course module as they provide an enriching and diverse learning experience for both native and non-native speakers. Therefore, we propose implementing an additional support lab that provides individualized language instruction, in-class discussions and practice, and one-on-one tutoring, to improve writing, speaking, and listening skills in order to communicate more effectively in a team-based, technologically enhanced business environment.

Additionally, one of the natural outcomes of our most recent implementations, the success of our Honors communication class has resulted in a second generation of highly trained student leaders, many who seek additional communication training. Based on student-centered learning initiatives, we propose providing these students with additional communication experience by inviting them back into the program to serve as mentors for the current student population. Peer-to-peer learning has proven to be highly effective, as it is determined by students engaged in learning on multiple levels: the mentor and the student both actively negotiate the level of engagement with course materials, often communicating in a more real world fashion as they share and negotiate student-based strategies for success. For the mentor, this provides learning at the highest possible level via evaluation and application. Meanwhile, the matriculating student provides timely and critical feedback for both oral and written communication skills.

We envision utilizing our mentors in multiple facets of program's development including but not limited to: providing coached feedback for team projects, assisting in gathering assessment data, providing additional writing support and feedback in support labs and remediation courses. This model would be offered as the ultimate synthesis in student-centered learning: using a second generation of highly trained students to help support and mentor the growing skill base of incoming students.

In an ongoing attempt to support the Learning Centered Education Initiative, offering a varied curricular approach will enhance student learning, while assessing and holding students responsible for developing existing skill bases. Through consistent assessment of their strengths and preferred learning styles, all students will move into the role of primary agents responsible for their own learning, remaining consistent not only with LCE initiatives, but reflecting current trends within the business community as well. By individual placement into varying models of the course, students can further hone and shape their educational experience by meeting challenges that answer their own assessed needs, thus increasing active learning and mastery of skill competency, as outlined by LCE initiatives.

III. Technical Needs:

Students will have their writing assessed using existing computer labs and word-processing software. Assessment materials (instructions and other necessary documents) will be available to students in hard-copy form or will be accessed from existing educational software (Blackboard). Scoring of the written assessments will be conducted by existing faculty members.

After the new curricula are developed, Blackboard will be utilized to deliver course modules or parts of modules to students, to document and track student profiles, and for student collaboration in learning

groups.

IV. Work Plan:

The first step in implementation of the project is the writing and gathering of assessment materials. This step will be conducted by existing faculty. Another early task is the scheduling of the 400-500 new students admitted to the undergraduate business program each semester for the assessment. Because available faculty and teaching assistants are limited in number, both the writing and oral speaking diagnostic intake will be scheduled over the course of a week, first in April, then again in October.

The resulting written documents will be assessed by faculty members and support staff. This step in the assessment process will occur during June and again in December, to accommodate the admissions process. After the students have been assessed, they will be placed in courses and support labs depending upon their individual needs.

The development of support labs and the development of attending curriculum will take be developed and implemented by existing faculty members either during the academic year or during the summer months. Coordination and supervision of labs will take place during the academic year.

When the project is approved for funding we will begin development of the curricula for the two course emphases, with a deadline of completion by the start of Spring 2004 classes. At the end of that semester, the students who were admitted will be assessed again, to measure their progress.

Necessary curricula changes that emerge from this assessment will be implemented the following fall, when a similar assessment process will occur. At the end of spring semester, results of the project will be made available to other departments, colleges, and universities within the state system. In addition, the faculty responsible for the program will submit the results to appropriate conferences and research journals.

To assess 450 incoming students, develop curricula, and provide remediation, the additional task hours and milestones for existing faculty and staff breaks down as follows:

| PROJECT MILESTONES | HOURS | PERSONNEL |
|--|--------------|---------------------|
| Assessment materials development | 150 | Key |
| Initial assessment of mentors | 55 | Key, Faculty |
| Training and Supervision of Mentors, Spring 04 | 250 | Key, Graduate |
| Rating of initial writing assessment | 160 | Key, Faculty |
| Delivery of ESL Support Lab | 300 | Graduate |
| Development of course curricula | 150 | Faculty, Graduate |
| Evaluative Assessment of Mentors | 150 | Key, Faculty |
| Rating of second writing assessment | 160 | Key, Faculty |
| Production and dissemination of results | 270 | Key |
| Master Curriculum Adjustment | 150 | Key, Faculty |
| TOTAL HOURS: | 1,095 | Key, Faculty |
| | 450 | Graduate |

V. Key Personnel:

The key personnel involved in the design and implementation of the assessment program, its incorporation into the Management Communication courses and undergraduate Business Administration Program, and analysis and dissemination of results is:

- Diza Sauers (Lecturer), Assessments Coordinator, Business Communication Program, Eller College of Business and Public Administration, McClelland Hall 116, Tucson, AZ 85721. Phone: (520) 626-1253. Email: dsauers@eller.arizona.edu.

VI. Expected Results and Outcomes:

This proposal is being made with the anticipation of achieving a number of goals, including the identification of individual student needs regarding communication skills. This information will be used to inform student participants of their strengths and weaknesses in these areas. Although future funding would be desirable; however, the courses and labs developed should serve as a guiding footprint for continuing the assessment and mentoring process. Ideally, we would be able to progress to a model in which the strengths of the program continues to produce a second generation of mentors and support labs designed to enhance the delivery of course materials. Achievement of this goal would help maximize student success since equipping students with the recognition of their learning styles not only allows them to succeed in our courses but in their on-going educational endeavors.

Information to implement similar projects will be made available to those departments, colleges, and universities that are interested. Letters will be sent to writing and business communication programs and college deans within the state university system to inform them of the project and ask if they would like additional information, which will be provided upon request. For example, at the University of Arizona, this model could be utilized to replace the UDWPE in any number of disciplines. The results of the project will also be presented at Business Communication and related conferences as well as submitted for publication in research journals.

Course curricula will be assessed based on the analysis of student assessments. One of the goals of the project is to ensure that significant improvement in the identified communication needs of the students can be demonstrated by the end of the semester. If this is not the case, course curricula and pedagogy can then be altered to help achieve this goal. Ultimately, we intend to cultivate an environment of experimentation and flexibility in designing learning opportunities for students. This learning community will emphasize a holistic approach, connecting student courses, curricula, and the continued definition of broad learning goals that will lead them to success in the new information-based global economy.